

Predictors of representatives' and mayors' opinions whether their country should join the EU (Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria)

Many surveys study citizens' support for EU accession nowadays. The survey conducted by the T-RC with local representatives in some accession countries is unique in the sense that it reveals the attitude of an important decision-maker group. On a seven point scale, respondents indicated their agreement with the following statement: **"Our country should join the EU as soon as possible."** Preliminary data from three countries repeats the ranking of citizen surveys: the support is the highest in Bulgaria (6.08!), somewhat lower in Hungary (5.35) and very low in Estonia (3.92, which is below 4, the medium value!).

Multivariate analysis shows that political orientation and the support for democracy were the best predictors of EU-preference in each country. In Hungary those more to the left supported the EU more, while in Estonia and Bulgaria those to the right were more in favor of the EU. In each country respondents favorable to democracy were also more favorable to the EU. In Hungary and Estonia, two demographic variables, age and cultural capital, turned out to be a good predictor of the respondents' preference for EU accession. In both cases the *older* one was and the more cultural capital one had, the more he/she supported the country's entry into the EU. Localism and personal optimism proved to be important too. In Hungary and Bulgaria, those who put national goals ahead of local issues were significantly more favorable to the EU as well. In Hungary and Estonia, the more optimistic the respondent was about his/her personal future, the more he/she supported the EU.

Representatives in the Local Representative Survey were asked, whether they agree with the statement: the country (Hungary/Estonia/Bulgaria) should join the European Union as soon as possible. They could indicate their agreement on a seven point scale (1=completely disagree, 7=completely agree). Below we examine what demographic and political variables have an influence on the representatives' opinions about the EU.

The initial possible predictors for representatives' opinion on the EU were:

Demographic variables:

- AGE – the age of the respondent
- GENDER – whether the respondent is male or female
- SIZE OF THE MUNICIPALITY – the number of inhabitants in the municipality where respondent works
- CULTURAL CAPITAL – a variable computed from four other variables: the education level of respondents, if respondents use email and internet, and if they know a foreign language. These variables highly correlate, thus we managed to compute a factor score (new variable) that preserves enough information from these four.¹
- INCOME – respondents were asked to compare their own income to the average of

1 Cultural capital is the product of the principal component analysis of education level, email and internet use, and knowledge of foreign languages. The new variable, or factor, has low values for high cultural capital, and high values for low cultural capital. In Hungary, the eigenvalue of the factor was 2,043 that contains 51% of the information. In Estonia the eigenvalue was 1,973, and the factor preserved 49,3% information, and in Bulgaria it was 1,871, containing 46,8% information.

the town he is working at. On a seven point scale respondents could choose whether their income is much lower (1), average (4), or much higher (7), and anything in between.

- LEADERSHIP – this indicates if the respondent has any employees, thus if he/she is in a leading-management position

Political-ideological variables:

- POLITICAL ORIENTATION – this indicates whether the respondent considers him/herself more to the left or to the right in political life
- DEMOCRACY – respondents had to indicate on a seven point scale how much they agree with the statement, that democracy is not perfect, but it is the best possible form of government for the country.
- LOCALISM – this indicates whether respondents think that achieving national goals should have priority over solving local problems, or the other way around.
- PARTY MEMBERSHIP – this variable shows if respondents are member of a local political party
- FUTURE OPTIMISM – respondents were asked to indicate how optimistic they are towards their own personal future (1=will worsen, 7=will improve)
- COMPETITION – this shows whether respondents think that competition is good, or bad.

In comparison, the highest support for the EU among the local representatives and mayors was in Bulgaria (mean score 6,08 on a scale where 7 was most in favor and 1 not in favor of the EU accession), here 68% of the respondents chose the highest support (7). The second best support for the EU accession was in Hungary (mean score 5,35), where only a bit less than 50% of the respondents chose the highest score. In Estonia, with the lowest support for the EU (mean score 4,14), only 21% of the respondents supported completely the accession, while almost just as many did not support it at all (20%). Now let's turn to find out what factors have an influence on whether someone supports or opposes the country's entry into the European Union.

In **Hungary** there are six variables that have an influence on whether one thinks that the country should join the EU. From among the demographic variables, age and cultural capital have a significant effect. The older the respondent is, the more he/she supports the country's entry into the EU. The youngest group (21-40) has an average score of 4,48 on their opinion of EU accession, the 41-60 age group scored 5,47, and the oldest (above 61) group had an average of 5,9.

Age	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
1. 21 to 40	4.48	2.24	141
2. 41 to 60	5.47	2.04	461
3. 61 to 90	5.9	1.79	101
Total	5.33	2.1	703

F=17 p=0,000

Cultural capital has similar effect on the opinion of the EU: the more cultural capital one

possesses, the more he/she supports the EU accession.

There are four political-ideological predictors that have significant effect on opinion towards EU accession. According to political orientation, those who consider themselves on the left side of the political scale are much more for the EU than those on the right. This variable is the best predictor in the model ($\beta = -0,29$).

Political orientation	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Left	6.42	1.4	115
Center	4.39	2.23	69
Right	4.15	2.26	67
Total	5.36	2.08	709

F=18,6 p=0,000

The importance contributed to democracy is the second most important predictor ($\beta = 0,25$), thus those who support democracy also tend to be more supportive of the EU².

Democracy best for country	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Disagree	3.3	2.23	43
Medium	4.73	2.1	64
Agree	5.56	1.98	617
Total	5.35	2.08	724

F=28,8 p=0,000

The third political predictor is future optimism. Whether someone thinks that his/her personal future will improve has a positive effect on the opinion of the EU. Respondents who were least optimistic and thought their life will worsen in the future had an average of 4,16, while the most optimistic had a 5,71 average score on the EU variable.

Personal life in the future	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Will worsen	4.16	2.37	114
No change	5.27	2.12	193
Will improve	5.71	1.86	406
Total	5.35	2.09	713

F=9,7 p=0,000

The last, and weakest predictor is whether someone thinks that local issues should be given more attention in the municipality than national issues. From the results it appears that those who think that national goals are more important, also indicate more support for entry into the EU.

2 This result is not completely reliable because the answers to the democracy variable are not evenly distributed.

Local vs. national issues	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
National	6.11	1.78	84
Both	5.39	2.05	300
Local	5.14	2.14	340
Total	5.36	2.08	724

F=7,38 p=0,000

In **Estonia** the regression model also only included two out of the four demographic variables: age (with much less significance) and cultural capital, with similar strength as in Hungary. These variables have the same effect here, the older one is or the more cultural capital one possesses, the more he/she believes in the EU accession.

Political-ideological predictors were also important in the case of Estonia. Interestingly political orientation here has an opposite effect compared to Hungary. Those respondents, who are rather on the left end of the political scale were more against, while those on the right more in favor of the EU accession³.

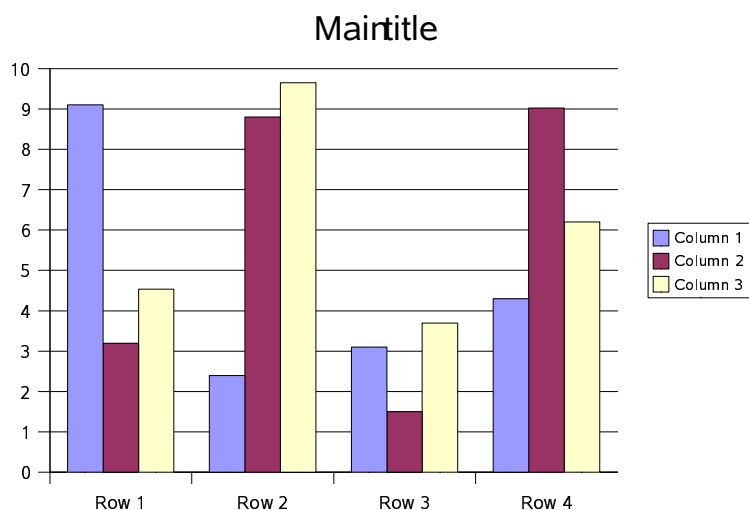
Political orientation	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Left	3.19	2.19	134
Center	3.79	2.15	244
Right	4.6	2.17	410
Total	4.11	2.23	788

F=25,2 p=0,000

With the other political-variable, democracy, we can say that the stronger the belief in democracy is, the more the respondent believes in the EU as well. The influence of these two predictors was the highest, their beta coefficients were 0,20 and 0,21 in the prediction model.

One more variable had an influence on whether one would like the country to join the EU: the respondent' perspective on the future. Those, who think that their life will improve in the future are more in favor of EU accession than those who think their life will worsen.

³ It must be noted that this data is not completely reliable, since the responses to the political orientation variable were skewed to one side (the left wing).



Thus, similarly as in Hungary, the optimists rather than the pessimists are for the EU.

Personal life in the
future

	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
National	3.4	2.26	119
Both	3.28	2.25	108
Local	4.29	2.2	575
Total	4.02	2.25	802

F=14,9 p=0,000

In **Bulgaria** there were no demographic variables that would have influenced the respondent' opinions about their country' accession. This might be due to the fact that age for example correlates with political orientation, the importance of democracy, the importance of national issues and party membership. Cultural capital also correlates with political orientation and the importance of democracy. Thus, age and cultural capital have both turned out to be insignificant because the other, non-demographic variables contain most of the information from them.

The evaluation of democracy turned out to be the best predictor here as well (like in Estonia) with a coefficient value of 0,39. The more support one gives for democracy, the more he/she will support the country' s entry into the EU.

Democracy best for
country

	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Disagree	4.49	2.34	84
Medium	5.43	1.8	58
Agree	6.45	1.23	450
Total	6.07	1.65	592

F=66,8 p=0,000

The second most important predictor is whether someone is on the political left or right (beta=0,14). The direction of the relationship is the same as in Estonia: the more one is on the right, the more he/she supports the EU.

Political orientation	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Left	5.58	1.91	229
Center	6.23	1.57	133
Right	6.55	1.12	221
Total	6.09	1.63	583

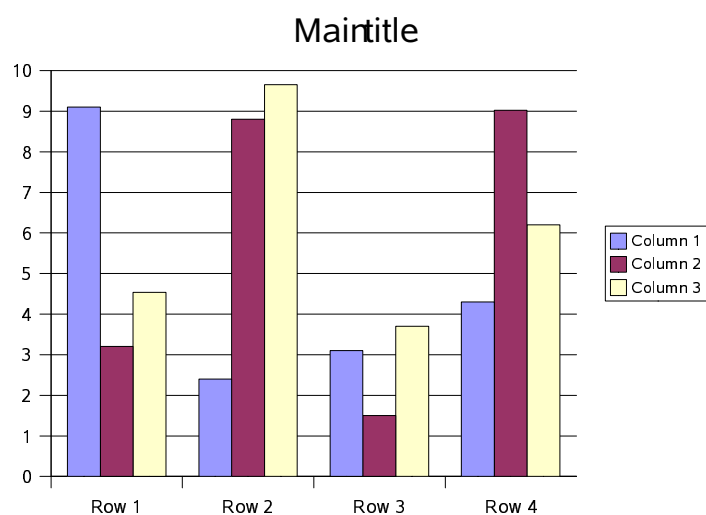
F=22,14 p=0,000

The next best predictor is whether someone considers national or local issues as most important in the municipality. Here, as well as in Hungary and Estonia, those respondents who prioritize national over local goals also supported the EU more.

Finally in Bulgaria the regression model also included whether the respondent was a member of a political party or not, even though the influence of this was very little (beta=0,09). Party members thought the EU important on an average of 5.73, while non-party members had an average of 6.13. Thus, party members thought it more important that the country join the EU than non-party members.

Political party membership	Mean	Stand. Deviation	N
Member	5.73	1.83	96
Not member	6.13	1.63	477
Total	6.06	1.67	573

F=4,69 p=0,031



To summarize, it can be stated that in Hungary and Estonia two demographic variables,

age and cultural capital turned out to be good predictors of the respondents' preference for EU accession. In both cases the older one was and the more cultural capital one had, the more he/she supported the country's entry into the EU. In Bulgaria the demographic variables correlated too much with the other predictors (political, democracy, localism, party membership), thus they are not necessary in our model.

	Hungary	Estonia	Bulgaria
Model's explanatory strength (adjusted R ²)	0.289	0.169	0.224
Model fit (F, p=0,000)	47.175	32.625	27.700
Coefficients: Age	0.22	0.09	-
Cultural capital	-0.13	-0.13	-
Left-Right	-0.29	0.20	0.14
Democracy	0.25	0.21	0.39
Localism	-0.08	-	-0.11
Party member	-	-	0.09
Future life	0.15	0.10	-

In each country political orientation and the support for democracy were the best predictors of the EU-preference. The effect of political orientation was however not the same in the three countries: in Hungary those more to the left supported the EU more, while in Estonia and Bulgaria those to the right were more for the EU.

The effect of democracy was basically the same everywhere: in each country respondents favorable to democracy were also more favorable to the EU.

In Hungary and in Bulgaria localism – whether someone put local goals ahead of national goals – was also influential. Those who put national goals ahead of local issues were more favorable to the EU as well.

The future perspective of respondents turned out to be significant only in two countries as well: in Hungary and Estonia. In both cases the more optimistic the respondent was about his/her personal future, the more he/she supported the EU.

And finally, party membership was only significant in Bulgaria, where party members were less favor of the EU accession than non-party members.